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**The Armored Cavalry Regiment in the 1990s:  
Time to Restore the Eyes and Ears of the Corps Commander**

by

Mark D. Daniels  
CS-13                      CIA  
Seminar #2

A paper submitted to the Faculty of the Naval War College in partial satisfaction of the requirements of the Department of Operations.

The contents of this paper reflect my own personal views and are not necessarily endorsed by the Naval War College or the Department of the Navy.

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## ABSTRACT

### **The Armored Cavalry Regiment in the 1990s: Time to Restore the Eyes and Ears of the Corps Commander**

This paper addresses an apparent conflict between the doctrinal missions of the US Army's Armored Cavalry Regiment (ACR). Its primary mission--and its proper operational role according to the author--is to perform reconnaissance and security for the Corps commander. In practice, however, the ACR is more often employed in an economy-of-force role, tasked to attack or defend much like any tank or mechanized infantry brigade.

Although the ACR is organized and equipped as a heavy, combined arms force, this only encourages the commander to wrongly commit his scouts to decisive battle. Win or lose, this concept that the cavalry should have to 'fight for information' can only result in the loss of the commander's eyes and ears--a potentially fatal mistake at any level of conflict.

The author recommends strictly limiting the cavalry's mission to reconnaissance and security and, to enhance its currently poor scouting capability as well as preclude its continued misuse, organizing and equipping it as a light armored (wheeled) force optimized for mobility and stealth.



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## PREFACE

Today, the 2nd and 3rd Armored Cavalry Regiments (ACRs) are in Saudi Arabia. Although their organization as armor-heavy, combined-arms forces will enhance their firepower and survivability on a flat, far-ranging desert battlefield, neither ACR is currently optimized for reconnaissance and security--their primary mission according to US Army doctrine. Both are equipped much like the tank and mechanized infantry brigades of the units they support--VII Corps and XVII Corps, respectively. At this writing, it remains to be seen how their squadrons will be employed--either as the eyes and ears of the commander or in an economy-of-force role.

Senior commanders will undoubtedly consider it heresy to suggest that the ACR is too heavily armed to perform its primary tasks well and that its tanks and cavalry fighting vehicles could be better employed in units specifically designed for offensive or defensive missions. In this case, however, jealously guarded combat power is driving the mission. The trend, in fact, has been toward increasingly heavier firepower and protection at the expense of stealth and mobility--the essence of scouting.

My discussion of the issue of the cavalry's proper missions, organization, and equipment will focus almost exclusively on the ground cavalry as opposed to air cavalry, which is unarguably a critical element of the reconnaissance and security team. My own experience rests on the ground and, moreover, this is where I believe a fix is most needed. Moreover, although I am focusing my discussion on the cavalry regiment at Corps level, my argument applies equally to cavalry missions at every level of command.

If any of the background data or references I use to support my argument have recently been revised, I hope that will not divert the reader from considering that fundamental changes in our national security environment require at least a review of warfighting doctrine if not major changes in how we apply our military resources to protect US interests.

Although I have tried to emphasize the operational implications of wasting the Army's limited reconnaissance and security assets, it is impossible to show the disconnect between the cavalry's doctrinal and real world missions without discussing organization and equipment. This is not meant to be a force planning paper, but it may appear so as I attempt to explain how the current situation developed and how it could be remedied.

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## INTRODUCTION

Today, there are five Armored Cavalry Regiments (ACRs) in the total Army. Until recently, two of them--the 2d and the 11th ACRs--were forward deployed in Germany serving as covering forces for VII and V Corps, respectively. The 3d ACR was stationed at Fort Bliss, Texas. Both the 2d and 3d ACRs have now been deployed to Saudi Arabia as part of Operation Desert Shield/Storm. The last two regiments remain stateside within the reserve force structure (Army National Guard).

In the cavalry's long history (the 2d ACR is the oldest continuously serving unit in the Army), the regiment has undergone numerous transformations as its horses were replaced with motorized vehicles and sabers were sheathed for machineguns and cannon. Along with this modernization came a separation of the cavalry's traditional missions of reconnaissance and security and its more offensive role as mobile shock troops. As the Army mechanized between World Wars I and II, three separate branches emerged to address different requirements. The Army's primary offensive weapon--tanks--were concentrated in the armor branch. The mechanized infantry took the place of mounted riflemen. The cavalry retained its reconnaissance and security role, however, there was debate (still ongoing) over how the cavalry should be organized and equipped.

## **The Problem**

Over time, this debate about how lightly or heavily to arm, protect, and transport the scout has, in my view, confused the real issue. All five of the Army's regiments--doctrinally--have the same missions and are almost identical in their Tables of Organization and Equipment (TO&E). They reflect a decisive role for the cavalry in the US Army's doctrine for fighting mid to high-intensity warfare against the Warsaw Pact in Central Europe.

This scenario demands forces able to slug it out with an armor-heavy foe, but fixation on this threat and organizing and equipping the cavalry for combat has--opposite of what should be the process--shaped its present mission.

Although the cavalry's primary responsibilities are supposed to be reconnaissance and security, I believe that the Army's operational doctrine only pays lip service to this requirement, counting on other intelligence gathering assets available to commanders at Corps and even Division level. National technical means are increasingly responsive to front line leaders, an advantage the US has enjoyed in the Persian Gulf. I would argue, however, that battlefield reconnaissance, counterreconnaissance, early warning, screening missions and the like remain essential functions of the ACR, but are roles it is not optimized to perform.

The ACR is designed as a heavy, combined arms force intended to attrit Soviet tanks entering the covering force area as well as

perform other missions dictated by the Corps commander in an economy-of-force role. Theoretically and in practice, this entails being committed to attack or defend just as any other tank or mechanized infantry brigade.

I submit that this should never be the role assigned to cavalry at any level because, win or lose, it results in at least temporary loss of the only elements trained to serve as the commander's eyes and ears. Scouts relegated to heavy armored fighting vehicles are ill-equipped to perform their proper role and only invite wrongful use. A changing national security environment and our evolving doctrine of AirLand Battle-Future makes these missions more inappropriate than ever.

## FACTS AND ANALYSIS

### Changes in the National Security Environment

In December 1988, President Gorbachev announced in a speech at the United Nations that the Soviet Union would make unilateral reductions in its military forces. Over the next two years, this promise was backed up by the withdrawal of many offensive ground force weapons and aircraft, the restructuring of forward deployed units in accordance with the Soviets' new, allegedly defensive doctrine, and commensurate cutbacks in military production. Clearly, the motivation behind these changes is Gorbachev's conviction that the Soviet defense sector, long the beneficiary of



the highest priority for the nation's best resources, must now contribute to his industrial modernization and economic revitalization programs. Abandoning the confrontational style of 'old thinkers,' Gorbachev has so far encouraged a more benign political climate within which he could implement his reforms.

Although this process is as yet neither complete nor its full implications clear, there is general agreement in the West that these changes and the dissolution of the Warsaw Pact have practically eliminated the Red Army's ability to launch an offensive--on short notice--powerful enough to defeat NATO. Increasing turmoil in the USSR, problems with CFE and START negotiations, and the possibility of a resurgence of hardline communism could very well reverse this trend. Systemic economic problems and ethnic strife, however, will almost certainly continue to negatively impact on the Soviets' ability to challenge the US in a test of military power which is increasingly based on economic and technological strength.

At the same time, however, the proliferation of nuclear, biological, and chemical weapons as well as conventional arms in the Third World has created an increasingly potent, widespread, and belligerent threat among traditional Soviet client states with long histories of antagonism toward the US. The current situation in the Persian Gulf, for example, is indicative of the changing threat. Iraq, with oil money to purchase weapons of mass destruction, has grown--at least in Hussein's mind--powerful enough to upset the balance of power in another region critical to US national security.

Other concerns of our military strategists, outlined in the Secretary of Defense's 1980 "Annual Report to the President and the Congress," include counternarcotics, counterterrorism, and Low Intensity Conflict (LIC). Clearly, defense policy priorities are shifting from one oriented almost exclusively on the Soviet threat in Europe to others only slightly less sophisticated, but more numerous and dispersed in remote parts of the world.<sup>1</sup>

At the same time that our commitments overseas are increasing, Congress continues to be the driving force behind deep cuts in US military force levels. A recession, growing budget deficit, and frightening bills coming due for such things as the war with Iraq and the S&L crisis at home suggests there is little hope for the armed forces to maintain the manpower levels, equipment and weapons stores, and state of readiness restored over the last decade. Army divisions, Air Force wings, and Navy fleets stationed overseas will be coming home...some to be inactivated, others to be scaled down with greater reliance on the reserve components. Operating tempos and training will suffer.

In the US Army's posture statement for fiscal year 1991, "Trained and Ready," Undersecretary of the Army Stone and Chief of Staff General Vuono state that:

"The Army must be able to encounter a wide array of potential and unpredictable threats with a relatively small force. The nation cannot afford to maintain forces uniquely specialized for every conceivable geographical area and type of combat."<sup>2</sup>

As a result of budget cuts and force reductions, they go on to call for the Army to be, all at the same time, a versatile, deployable, and lethal force--no small task given the cutbacks.

likely impact on our current force structure and readiness. Events beyond the Army's control will hurt--not enhance--deployability, for example, as more OCONUS bases are closed and the Air Force is compelled to accept similar cuts--probably in strategic airlift.

Addressing himself specifically to the armor community in an article in 'Armor' magazine, General Vuono repeats that, "As a result of the reshaping of the Army, the Army of the decade [1990s]...will be smaller. We will continue to have units forward deployed--although in smaller numbers."<sup>3</sup> Current projections are that the Army will be reduced to twelve active and six reserve divisions and, with some balance of heavy, light, and special operations forces, be restructured with an emphasis on LIC.

#### **Demands on Military Strategy**

It is in this environment of more varied albeit less intense threats to US national security and impending budget cuts that the US Army, as well as the other services, is going to have to perform its numerous missions. What kind of force will the Army be able to sustain and modernize while staying within budget? Obviously, we are looking at a smaller force in both the active and reserve components. Money for new weapons development and equipment upgrades will be limited, so old equipment easy to maintain and cheaper to operate will have to suffice for longer periods. Funds for procurement of new, sophisticated, and inherently expensive weapons will stretch out buys and slow force

modernization.

To derive maximum benefit from new equipment, it will have to be versatile and flexible, capable of performing more than one function in all physical environments. Its life cycle costs must be low. Because most of it will have to be stationed Stateside but be strategically mobile for rapid deployment in case of a crisis overseas, it will ideally be air transportable. Once on the ground, it must not be reliant on heavy equipment transporters, but be tactically mobile, less prone to breakdowns, and less demanding on the supply system for POL and parts.

Of course, these constraints do not negate the basic requirement for military vehicles and equipment to be both combat effective and survivable. Advances in military technology have given us lighter weight armor plate, more powerful guns in smaller calibers, longer range ATGMs, smaller engines with greater horsepower to weight ratios and better fuel economy, and mobility enhancements such as run-flat tires and rough terrain suspensions. It is possible for vehicles other than tanks to fight and survive on the modern battlefield...and to more cost effectively perform the reconnaissance and security mission.

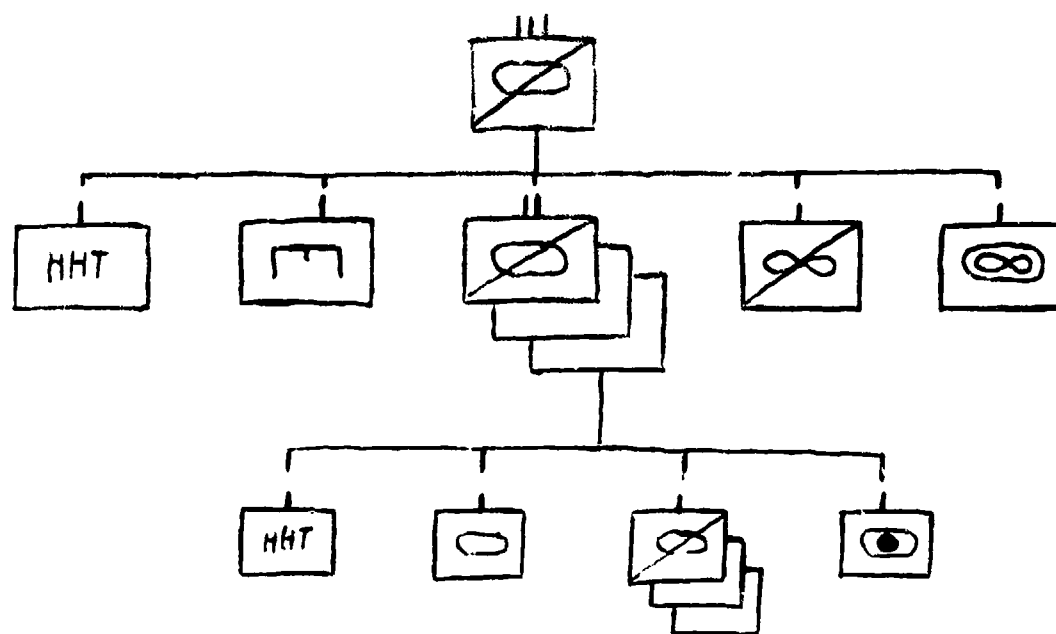
#### **The Armored Cavalry Regiment Today**

**Mission:** According to the US Army's keystone warfighting manual, FM 100-5 Operations, the basic tasks of cavalry units are reconnaissance and security. It goes on to state, however, that their unique ability to find the enemy, develop the situation, and

provide the commander warning also make armored cavalry units ideal for economy-of-force missions. According to the field manual, cavalry forces can delay an attacker, assist in a withdrawal and, *when reinforced with tanks*, are capable of attacking and defending, *although these are not their normal missions*.

In recent practice, however, this is in fact how the ACRs have been utilized. Corps commanders in Europe, whether compelled for political reasons to retain terrain rather than trade it for time or unable to resist exploiting the ACR's combat power to increase the density of their main battle area defenses, have planned to thin their covering force and assign the ACR a sector as if it were another of their tank or mechanized infantry brigades.

Organization: The temptation to utilize the ACR as just another heavy brigade is the result of its organization and equipment. The ACR is organized as an armor heavy, combined arms force designed to satisfy the tenets of the AirLand Battle doctrine (initiative, depth, agility, and synchronization) in a mid to high-intensity combat environment. In fact, its organic strength exceeds the combat power of a tank brigade. The ACR is comprised of three line squadrons, each having three cavalry troops, a separate tank company, and an organic self-propelled (SP) artillery battery as well as headquarters and combat service support elements. The regiment's combat power is supplemented by an air cavalry squadron, engineers, air defense, and additional Corps artillery (see diagram).



Equipment: The regiment's ground combat equipment includes the most heavily armored and armed vehicles in the Army's inventory. Assigned down to line units, for example, are M1A1 Abrams tanks, M2 Bradley Cavalry Fighting Vehicles (CFVs), and M109-series self-propelled (SP) howitzers. The requisite combat support and service support needed to back up and maintain, fuel, and arm this heavy force is commensurately large.

#### **The Mission Should Drive the TO&R**

There is a serious disconnect between what doctrine states-- and what I agree--are appropriate missions for cavalry units and those they are assigned in practice. Reconnaissance and security are valid, worthwhile missions for the cavalry. No other ground element is trained for these tasks. The problem arises when the

commander tasks his cavalry--unreinforced--to *develop the situation* in the covering force area or utilizes it in an economy-of-force role--assigning the ACR its own sector in a linear defense, for example.

Major General Foley, Commander of the Armor Center at Fort Knox, perpetuates this practice when, while paying lip service to reconnaissance and security, he states that the requirements for the cavalry to strip away enemy reconnaissance elements, maintain contact with the enemy force, and channelize its movement call for a flexible, responsive, and lethal regiment.<sup>4</sup>

I concur; however, I disagree with his conclusion that tanks and other heavy, tracked vehicles must be retained to accomplish those missions. Enemy reconnaissance elements can be defeated with lesser weapons than tank cannon or be engaged with long range precision fires directed by the scouts. Moreover, maintaining contact with the enemy force does not imply that you must be decisively engaged with them. Finally, channelizing the enemy should be accomplished by engineer work to reinforce or deny terrain to them by ground work or mines, and indirect rather than direct fires.

In addition to reiterating the Army's judgment that the ACR must have the capability to both attack and defend, Foley claims that the cavalry might have to 'fight for information.' I contend that good intelligence and targeting information is best obtained by a unit that does not get involved in the battle, but provides the information which allows the commander to better deploy his close combat elements. If the scouts become pinned down in an

engagement, in my view, they will be forced to look after their own lives rather than the security of the force as a whole and will therefore have failed in one of their principal goals.

The predictable result of this practice is the loss of the commander's eyes and ears. Engaging in a decisive tank engagement to force the enemy to commit himself forward of the main battle area, the cavalry loses its ability to maneuver, observe the "big picture," and report it effectively. Even more obviously, limited and restrictive boundaries which put the ACR into the role of just another tank or mechanized infantry brigade prevents it from screening the flanks or performing a rear area protection function--both valid missions for the cavalry and, one would think, of vital concern to the commander.

Why would the commander do this? Clearly, he does it because the ACR's overabundance of firepower, armor protection, and mobility improves his relative combat power against an enemy--at least in the traditional European scenario--who will vastly outnumber his forces. The unquestionable value of tanks, CFVs, and SP howitzers in head-to-head mechanized warfare argue against withholding a significant portion of his combat power from the fight. He becomes fixated on the most critical threat of the moment, forgetting that lack of continuous security and reconnaissance could lead to a surprising change in the situation. Even if the commander succeeds in blunting the enemy's initial thrust, an unexpected secondary or supporting attack on the flank, or enemy airmobile operation in his rear, could snatch defeat from the jaws of victory.



Although it is not a perfect parallel, the example of Lee's cavalry before Gettysburg illustrates the danger of losing control of your reconnaissance and security elements. J.E.B. Stuart had taken his cavalry far afield of Lee's main army as it marched into Pennsylvania, raiding Union facilities and seeking supplies. As a result, Lee, without information on the whereabouts of McClellan's army, essentially stumbled into a meeting engagement which developed into a decisive battle he would rather not have fought at that time and place.

Anyway, the size of an ACR and the term *economy of force* seem to be contradictory. Indeed, the total combat power of an ACR exceeds that of all other brigade sized units. Moreover, its equipment is ill suited for reconnaissance and security. Without getting into details about individual vehicle characteristics, the tanks and CFVs in the line troops are too heavy, too slow, and too noisy to "snoop and poop"--the essential scout skill. Low weight capacity bridges, narrow defiles or city streets, and water obstacles are not negotiable by tanks or SP howitzers and not by CFVs under some conditions.

In reconnaissance, the cavalry must orient on the enemy force. Typically, the reconnaissance elements of Soviet or Bloc supplied armies have superior mobility, forcing our scouts to be faster and less constrained by terrain and weather. Stealth is another requirement for a good scout. Heavy tracked vehicles are simply too noisy, easily identified by enemy scouts and preventing our own from hearing what is going on around them in periods of limited visibility.

In providing security, the cavalry must orient on the friendly force, but this too requires superior tactical mobility over wide and varying terrain--especially if the force is moving. Without a large reconnaissance force or air cavalry, speed is essential in screening across a wide front, two flanks, and possibly also the rear.

In both cases, I contend that the ACR is provided with too much firepower--creating an urge to get *into* trouble when all they should have is enough weaponry to get themselves *out* of trouble.

In addition, as already discussed, the increasing cost of tracked, armored fighting vehicles makes them a precious resource that--in my view--should be concentrated in offensive formations. The Army's tanks, CFVs, and howitzers could be better employed in a time of hard force planning choices to maintain a solid base of heavy armored units. Despite the lessons that should be derived from our current crisis, these formations almost certainly will take the bulk of impending cutbacks at a time when the wave of the future seems to be LIC.

## CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

### The Proper Role of Cavalry in Military Operations

In conclusion, I believe that a changing national security environment demanding less costly yet more capable scout forces necessitates an already overdue change in US Army doctrine

regarding cavalry operations. The still evolving AirLand Battle-Future doctrine should strictly limit the missions of the cavalry to reconnaissance and security and, to avoid its wrongful commitment to decisive battle, the ACR at corps level and the cavalry squadron at division level should be organized and equipped commensurately.

In my view, that is with light armored (preferably wheeled) vehicles organized into a smaller but more strategically and tactically mobile force. Scouts ill equipped for heavy combat would better serve the commander while, at the same time, cost less in procurement, operations, and maintenance, and be more responsive to contingency missions abroad.

In the covering force area during a defense, the cavalry should be used to provide screening, early warning, and direct long range fires on the enemy. It would have only a limited ability to cover the force and not enough to guard the main battle area. If additional firepower is needed to attrit the enemy or develop the situation, tank or mechanized infantry units should be put under the operational control of the regimental commander. When the screen has accomplished its purpose, the cavalry elements should pass back through the lines and revert to flank or rear area security.

In the offense, the cavalry should be used similarly--now in reconnaissance--forward of the main body and to its flanks, handing off any battle to the heavier combat arms. It would then continue both reconnaissance--to find weak points in the enemy's defenses--and security--to preclude an enemy surprise that would

surrender the initiative to him. Reconnaissance and security, then, whether in the offense or defense, provides a payoff to the commander in terms of time and space to position his forces and coordinate his actions.

#### Light Armored Cavalry in AirLand Battle-Future

Current cavalry missions, organization, and equipment are intended to support AirLand Battle doctrine. I would argue that the recommendations above are not inconsistent with its tenets, and perhaps more so. A linear form of mid to high-intensity warfare with a deep battle aspect would seem to place even more reliance on the greater *synchronization* of assets possible to a commander better informed of the enemy's situation and confident that his own flanks and support functions are secure. The higher speed, lower noise signature and weight of light armored vehicles would provide far superior *agility* to that of heavy, tracked vehicles, enhancing his ability to see and influence events in *depth*. Finally, dedicated and sustained reconnaissance and security would insure against his loss of the initiative.

In view of the changing national security environment and the changes in AirLand Battle doctrine designed to address them, my recommendations would appear even more appropriate. Envisioning a more fluid, less linear battlefield in the future, General Vuono states that "Armor of the future must be mobile, agile, versatile, lethal, survivable, and deployable."<sup>6</sup> Foley adds that cavalry units will have to operate over extended distances and with

greater dispersion.

In my mind, this is a call for a level of flexibility and mobility that only wheeled vehicles can provide. It is a difficult if not impossible demand on tank equipped forces. Light, 4-wheel drive vehicles are far better suited to negotiate narrow forest or mountain trails, steep inclines, small bridges, and other routes that would prove obstacles to tanks in rugged, undeveloped Third World countries. Despite our current crisis, Grenada and Panama are probably more indicative of the environments in which the US Army may have to fight in the 1990s. Moreover, the firepower and armor protection of tanks are simply not called for in many LIC scenarios--certainly not as scouts--and may send the wrong signal in a situation where flexible response is called for.

In another 'Armor' magazine article entitled, "The Light Armored Force: An Urgent Need, A Ready Solution," Captain David Nobles cites our demand for rapidly deployable forces that can be committed to LICs anywhere in the world. He writes:

"We need a light armored cavalry regiment.... Less expensive wheeled AFVs could provide a full range of armor and cavalry support for the RDF when committed to a low intensity conflict." They "could be rapidly deployed and provide mobility, flexibility, and timely battlefield intelligence."<sup>6</sup>

Having analyzed recent technical advances and advantages of wheeled over tracked vehicles in most situations, he points out that our reconnaissance and security problem can be solved quickly and at low cost with off-the-shelf technology and doctrine.

"[Wheeled] light armored forces could [cost effectively] perform

reconnaissance and counter-reconnaissance, rear area security, and guard the main battle forces."<sup>7</sup>

Survivability, although not the principal consideration for scouts, must be addressed as the most apparent weakness in this proposed fix. Ironically, even Major General Foley admits that battalion scout platoons, mounted in only light wheeled HMMWVs, performed their reconnaissance and security tasks with "outstanding results" during Reformer 90. He states that enhanced tactical mobility and proper scout tactics made them survivable under a wide variety of battlefield conditions. I believe this lesson is no less applicable at division and corps level than it is at battalion. The scout correctly ensures his survivability not with thicker armor and bigger guns, but by 'sneaking and peeking.'

Foley's own Command Sergeant Major, John Stevens, writes:

"Scouts have not performed well with the Bradley (too clumsy and too big) at the NTC [National Training Center]. Recent tests indicate that with a smaller, quieter vehicle (HMMWV) the scouts in heavy battalions have been very successful performing their mission. Their ability to go undetected around the battlefield has returned to the task force commander the added dimension that allows him to impose his will on the enemy."<sup>8</sup>

If the Army's vision of a fluid, non-linear battlefield and projections for LIC are accurate, dedicated and skillful reconnaissance and security should be an even more important part of AirLand Battle-Future doctrine, and the exclusive responsibility of cavalry forces at all levels.

## ENDNOTES

1. 5:3
2. 6:11-2
3. 9:15
4. 2:5
5. 9:13
6. 3:8 and 11
7. 3:13
8. 4:7

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